

# Constipation

## How do I know if my child is constipated?

If a child does not have a stool every day, it does not mean the child is constipated. Some signs of constipation include:

- Fewer bowel movements than usual.
- Stools may be hard, dry, and difficult to pass.
- Painful or bloody stools, if the skin tears when stool is passed.
- Upset, swollen, or hard stomach.
- A raw or bleeding rectum (area between buttocks).

Some children may not go to the bathroom on purpose to avoid painful side effects. It is important to take your child to the doctor if you notice that your child is not going to the bathroom regularly.

## \* What are normal stools?

Stools are considered normal if they are soft and easy to pass. There is no normal number of stools that a child should pass in a day.

## \* What should I do if my child is constipated?

1. Be patient with your child.
2. Offer your child healthy foods from all food groups, especially fresh fruits and vegetables and whole grains.
3. Offer more fluids. A child needs about 6–8 cups of fluid a day. Water and unsweetened juices are best. Prune, pear, and apple juices are natural laxatives

The most common causes include a **lack of**:

- Fluids
- Fiber-rich foods (fruits, vegetables, whole grains)
- A variety of foods
- Physical activity
- Regular toilet habits - ignoring the urge to have a bowel movement can result in constipation

Also, some medicines can cause constipation. Children with certain medical conditions, such as Down syndrome and cerebral palsy, are more likely to have constipation.



and can help relieve constipation. Up to 4 ounces of juice may be given per day. That equals no more than ½ cup a day.

4. Limit milk to 16 ounces a day. This equals no more than 2 cups a day.
5. Slowly add more fiber to your child's diet.
  - Give at least five servings of fruits and vegetables

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# What should I do if my child is constipated?

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daily. Peels provide fiber, so it's best to leave them on; just make sure they are well washed. If your child refuses the peel, mix fruits with their peels in a blender with  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup of apple or pear juice and some ice. Children are more likely to accept fruit peels that have been well blended.

- Some high-fiber foods are broccoli, corn, pinto beans, baked potato with skin, carrots, strawberries, apples, raisins, prunes, and pears. To prevent choking, avoid giving children under 2 years of age hard pieces of fruit and raw vegetables, whole grapes, raisins, and other dried fruits. For children over 2, cut grapes in half lengthwise, and carrots and celery into thin strips (not round pieces). Always watch children while they eat, and teach them to sit while eating.
  - Give your child whole-grain breads and cereals. Look for breads that are labeled "100% whole wheat." Choose foods with 3 grams of fiber or more per serving.
6. To stimulate a bowel movement, try giving your child a warm food like oatmeal or beverage like warmed milk when he wakes up in the morning.
  7. Encourage your child to get 60 minutes of physical activity daily. Examples include dancing, playing games like tag or hide and seek, playing at the playground, walking, skipping, riding a tricycle, swimming, and learning to kick or run after a soccer ball.
  8. If your child soils his underpants, do not shame him. He probably cannot help it. If he gets overly concerned about soiling his pants, he may not go to the bathroom when he gets the urge, which can make the problem worse.

9. Set regular toilet times for your child. Encourage, but do not force your child to sit on the toilet for at least 5 minutes after every meal.
10. Do not give any laxatives, suppositories, or mineral oil to your child without your doctor's advice because they may have harmful side effects.



## ✿ When should I call the doctor or clinic?

Call your doctor or clinic if your child:

- Still has fewer than three stools in one week, after you have tried the above suggestions.
- Has small amounts of blood in the stools.
- Complains of stomach pains.
- Strains or screams when he is trying to pass stools.
- Is tearful at the urge to use the toilet.
- Shows strong resistance to going to the toilet.

For more ideas to treat constipation, visit the American Academy of Pediatrics web site at [www.aap.org/topics.html](http://www.aap.org/topics.html).

Visit [www.choosemyplate.gov](http://www.choosemyplate.gov) for more information on a healthy diet.